



Bereavement Leave Guidance

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Supporting a colleague or peer who has suffered a bereavement

In the event that someone close to a team member passes away then do speak to them and offer condolences. It can be difficult to find the right words, but it is important to acknowledge their loss and offer appropriate support.

[Cruse.org – What to say when someone is bereaved](#)

- Ensure they know that work is not their priority at this time
- Ask how they would like to stay in contact
- Ask them what they would like their colleagues to be told and stick to the facts as the information is private
- Ask if they would like to be contacted by colleagues
- Signpost them to supports available and remind them of the importance of self-care
- Keep the dialogue open and review the situation regularly

Every bereavement is different. Due to the current requirement for social distancing as a result of Covid-19, staff may be unable to connect with personal support networks in traditional ways.

Social distancing and restrictions on travel will also impact on funeral arrangements, meaning that someone is unable to pay their respects in the way they would like, which can be a further source of distress.

“Hearing first-hand the story of a traumatic event can imprint itself on those supporting the bereaved” (Cruse Bereavement Care).

Some staff will be affected by dealing with increased instances of bereavement as part of their work role during the pandemic. Managers should ensure staff are aware of and have access to appropriate support resources. Please see list of helpful links at the end of this guidance.

1. PAID LEAVE

The following is a guide to the number of days bereavement leave:

Up to 10 working days paid leave (pro rata) on the death of a

- husband, wife, civil partner or partner (incl. same sex partners*)
- son or daughter**
- parent or step-parent
- brother or sister, step-brother/sister
- mother/father-in-law
- grandparents, grandchildren
- son-in-law, daughter-in-law
- any person with whom the employee is in a relationship of domestic dependency

*Includes a partner with whom the employee is co-habiting, but who is not the employee's legal spouse/partner.

** Includes where the child is stillborn after 24 weeks' pregnancy and in respect of whom the employee is the

- biological parent
- adoptive parent, if the child was living with them
- person who lived with the child and had responsibility for them, for at least 4 weeks before they died
- 'intended parent' – due to become the legal parent through surrogacy
- partner of the child's parent, if they live with the child and the child's parent in an enduring family relationship

If more than 1 child dies, the employee is entitled to 10 working days Statutory Parental Bereavement Leave for each child.

Line managers have the right to exercise discretion and extend beyond 10 days in exceptional circumstances.

Up to 1 days paid leave may be agreed on the death of any other relative to facilitate attendance at the funeral or, where attendance at the funeral is not possible due to Covid-19 related restrictions, time to reflect and remember their loved one.

- **In the event of funerals of non-relatives**, it is at the discretion of the line manager to approve short periods of paid leave to attend local funerals or, where attendance is not possible due to COVID-19 restrictions, reflect and remember their loved one. Otherwise, time off will require to be taken using annual leave or flexi time.
- Not all employees will need to take the full allowance, and some employees will need additional time, depending on their relationship with the person who has died and/or the circumstances of the death. Every bereavement is different.
- In considering the amount of leave, the line manager should consider the specific circumstances e.g. the relationship, where the employee has responsibility for funeral arrangements and/or the estate or where it is necessary for the employee to travel to attend a funeral.
- An employee should notify their line manager of the need to take leave as soon as possible or, at latest, on the first day of absence. In exceptional circumstances, applications for leave will be considered after the first day of absence.
- Line managers have the right to exercise discretion in exceptional circumstances as outlined above.
- Leave days do not have to be taken consecutively. Managers should be flexible in terms of when and how staff take bereavement leave.

2. ANNUAL LEAVE

In the event of a bereavement, managers should be sympathetic to requests for annual leave at short notice to supplement bereavement leave.

An employee who suffers a family bereavement while on annual leave can convert their annual leave into bereavement leave and take their annual leave at a future date.

3. UNPAID LEAVE

Unpaid leave on compassionate grounds up to a maximum of 5 days may be granted after bereavement. An employee must consult with their line manager before starting unpaid leave.

4. RETURN TO WORK

In certain circumstances a full return to work may not be possible for an employee following a bereavement – for example, when the employee’s grief is likely to impact on their ability to perform their role, or where new child care arrangements have to be sourced or responsibility for the care of an elderly parent/relative has transferred to the employee. In such situations, some flexibility of the working pattern may be agreed to allow the employee to deal with appointments or arrangements.

The line manager may also discuss the option of allowing a phased return to work on a part-time basis/reduced hours basis where feasible. Alternative duties may also be considered. Any such arrangements would need to be agreed in advance by the line manager, would be subject to an agreed maximum number of days and would be managed in line with The Highland Council flexible working policy – (salary payment during this time would be based on the number of hours/salary grade applicable to the role being undertaken.)

As noted above, in section 2, bereavement leave days do not need to be taken consecutively – for example, an employee could return to work whilst funeral arrangements are put in place, but then take some further leave following the funeral, or following their return to work once the funeral has taken place.

5. EMPLOYEE SUPPORT

The Highland Council acknowledges that bereavement leave is intended to support employees in the immediate period around a bereavement. However, the process of grief, the natural reaction and adjustment to loss and change may take a significant time and will be personal to each individual.

An employee with any concerns about the grieving process impacting on their work performance should discuss this in confidence with their line manager, to ensure that any reasonable adjustments that may be necessary are discussed and put in place and that the employee is supported in their return to the full range of duties and responsibilities that they had prior to the bereavement or their duties and

responsibilities are adjusted (as necessary) with the prior agreement of the line manager.

The Highland Council recognises that not all employees require counselling to cope effectively with their grief. However, for employees wishing to seek professional help in coming to terms with a significant loss, the [Employee Assistance Programme](#) (EAP) includes a **Counselling service** where staff can be supported either online via web chat, by phone or face to face where appropriate.

The EAP is available to staff and their family members every day, 365 days per year.

For staff who have experienced the death of a colleague or where employees are supporting a colleague who is bereaved, this may impact on individuals or the team as a whole. It is important to recognise this and provide support to individuals and teams at this time.

[Toolbox talk - Bereavement](#)

[Toolbox talk - Bereavement by Suicide](#)

6. HEALTH AND SAFETY

Bereavement can have an impact on concentration, sleep and decision-making. The health and safety assessment of the workplace will include consideration of the impact of bereavement on employees, their duties and responsibilities, and the context in which they are working, e.g. Do they operate heavy machinery?

An employee who is concerned about their ability to conduct their duties safely in the weeks following bereavement must discuss this with their line manager.

The Highland Council reserves the right to request an employee to meet with the Occupational Health Provider before resuming full duties.

7. CULTURE AND DIVERSITY

The Highland Council recognises that different cultures respond to death in significantly different ways.

Line managers will check whether the employee's religion or culture requires them to observe any particular practices or make special arrangements which would necessitate them being off work at a particular time. Employees should not assume that their line manager is aware of any such arrangements and should draw this to their line manager's attention as soon as possible.

Line managers who are unsure how to respond to a bereaved employee from a different culture should ask the bereaved employee or someone else from their culture group about what is appropriate.

Helpful Links/Contacts

[Child Bereavement UK](#)

[Cruse Bereavement Care Scotland](#)

[Dying Matters](#)

[Highland Hospice](#)

[Scot Gov – What to do when someone dies \(step by step\)](#)

[**THC – Bereavement payment**](#)

[**THC - Bereavement by Suicide toolbox talk**](#)

[**THC – Bereavement toolbox talk**](#)

[THC - Employee Assistance Programme \(EAP\)](#)

[**THC – Funerals, Graves and Cremations**](#)

[**THC - Mental Health & Wellbeing Toolkit**](#)

[**THC - Mental Health Reps contact list**](#)

[**THC – Pensions – What to do after someone dies**](#)

[**THC - Registering a Death**](#)